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What Does the Future Hold for Petroglyphs in the Southeastern United States ?

By Tommy Charles, SCIAA Archaeologist

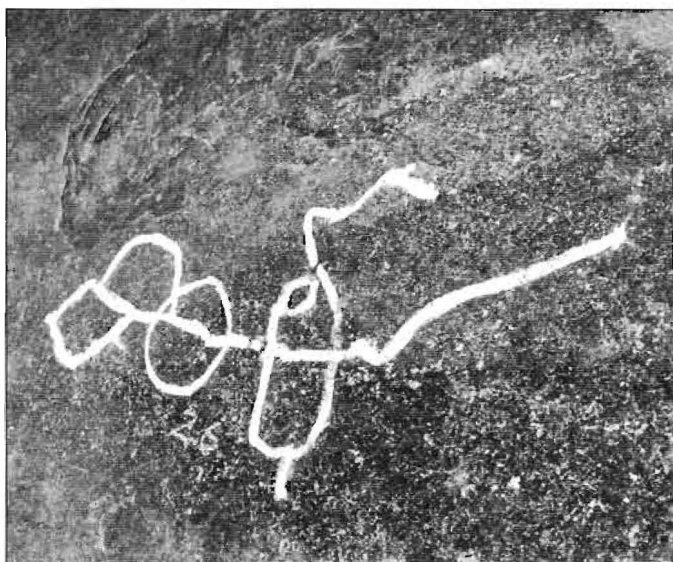
Based on current observations of researchers in the field, it seems that prehistoric petroglyphs of the region are well on their way to extinction. The reasons are several: The forces of nature, population growth and the subsequent expansion of housing, roads, and factories necessary to maintain the increasing numbers of people, are all factors. However, the major cause for concern may be something much more subtle, widespread and destructive—the pollution of our air and the resulting acid rains which may be accelerating the erosive process. The degree of damage to stone caused by acid rain may not be an exact science, but it is common knowledge that in recent decades

concern about ways to protect stone works of art.

Research into the erosion of rock art is currently being conducted by Steve Watts, a primitive technology expert with the Schiele Museum of Natural History in Gastonia, North Carolina. About a decade ago, Watts carved a series of



The ART Board of Trustees and friends gathered at Gauley Falls petroglyph site in Pickens County to see the drawings under bright lights. (Photo by Nena Powell Rice)



Detail of petroglyph in Pickens County, South Carolina. (Photo by Tommy Charles)

considerable damage has occurred to tombstones, marble statues, and building facades over much of the world, and it has become a cause of

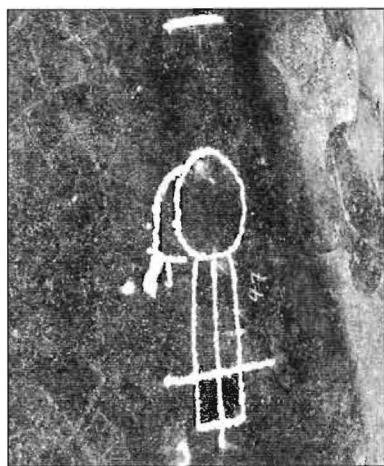
erosive forces of our present-day weather, and they indicate the rate of rock erosion in the southeast may greatly exceed that previously thought

possible. petroglyphs in different kinds of native stones and placed them in a natural environment. In the interim all of Watts carvings have experienced considerable damage—some eroding to the point of being almost non-existent. His experiments dramatically demonstrate the

possible.

What Watts has learned raises a question: If erosion has caused this much damage in a decade, then how is it possible that carvings hundreds or even thousands of years old are still visible? The answer remains unclear—perhaps we are seeing the remains of only the most boldly carved petroglyphs, those less deeply carved having disappeared, or perhaps those carvings having greater importance were periodically re-carved to keep them visible. Another possibility is that the environment was simply “cleaner” prior to the industrialization of the world, and therefore corrosive pollutants were not a major factor. Whatever the reason for the disappearance of petroglyphs in the southeastern United States, it is doubtful that more than a very small percentage of the total that were carved still exist.

It is for us to decide whether our children are to share with us these treasures left by some of our nation's earliest inhabitants. Perhaps we cannot save for them the rock art itself, but we can at least ensure them the opportunity to know what we have learned about it. To accomplish this we must first find and record the carvings that remain before they too are gone. Without the assistance of those who know of these carvings, they will not be found or recorded, and any hope of understanding their meaning will be lost forever. Please help me to preserve the legacy of these unknown peoples from our nations past. If you have knowledge of any markings on rocks, no matter how insignificant it may appear, please contact Tommy Charles, the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1321 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29208, or call (803) 777-8170. E-Mail: charlest@garnet.cla.sc.edu. Or: Mr. Steve Watts, Schiele Museum of Natural History and Planetarium, Inc., 1500 East Garrison Blvd., Gastonia, NC 28054-5199, (704) 866-6900. Names of informants and the locations of their carvings will be confidential unless they wish otherwise.



Detail of petroglyph in Pickens County, South Carolina. (Photo by Tommy Charles)

Seven New Members Join the ART Board

Ms. Lou Edens - Ms. Lou Edens is Director of Shem Creek Maritime Museum in Mt. Pleasant. She has actively promoted maritime history and archaeology in the Mt. Pleasant area. She is also involved in real estate business. The staff of the SCIAA Charleston Field Office have worked with Ms. Edens on various projects and public education events.

Mr. Grayson Hanahan - Mr. Grayson is a native of Charleston and graduate of Yale University. He is a part-owner of Millbrook Plantation on the Ashley River. He is a farmer and a scuba diver with an avid interest in local history.

Ms. Cyndy Hernandez - Ms. Hernandez has cooperated closely with the SCIAA Underwater Archaeology Division staff on the historic Pritchard Shipyard site located on her property in Mt. Pleasant. She has also hosted and organized public relations and educational events for local historical societies at her home.

Mr. James Kirby - Mr. Kirby is a graduate of Wofford College. He is President of Lexicode Corporation, which is a medical record coding and consulting firm located in Ballentine. He is an avid collector of coins and antique currency.

Dr. Sandy Nelson - Dr. Nelson has a Ph.D. in Education from USC. She is very active in the local community of Lancaster County and Chair of the Lancaster Historical Commission. She is also a member of the County Board of Natural Resources. She is currently employed by Carolina Health Care. She,

along with some of our current Board members, is involved in developing a children's coloring book with a local historical/educational theme.

Mr. Emerson Reed - Mr. Reed is a native of Charleston and served as a Navy pilot in WWII. He is involved in the real estate business and is a collector of antiques, especially firearms. His great interest is local history, and he is a member of the South Caroliniana Society.

Ms. Esther Shirley - Ms. Shirley is President of the Land Associates of Glassy Mountain International Limited. She is involved in the real estate business in the Greenville area. She has participated in the SCIAA Petroglyph Survey project in the upstate and introduced archaeologist Tommy Charles to many contacts in the local community.



Andee Steen, the Chair of the ART Board, has been associated with SCIAA for nearly 20 years. (Steen Photo)